

I helped create an alternative art center, in the early eighties, with the architect Kyong Park called STOREFRONT FOR ART AND ARCHITECTURE, in service to, and in collaboration with, an extraordinary community of artists and musicians living in and around New York City. Renting, and then renovating, an old Italian coffee grinder's storefront, with Kyong's modest savings and the love labor of our friends, STOREFRONT entered kicking and screaming, the proud child of an illicit relationship.

All hell broke loose when we opened on Prince Street, in 'Little Italy' during the Saint's Day festival, with our twenty-six nights of continuous art performance. A poignant and poetic foreshadowing to a courageous continuum, a roller coaster ride of inspiration and depression, within that great amusement park called the New York art world. In the years that follow, Kyong and his co-curators continually presented provocative art and architectural attacks on the bastille of convention. Feverishly challenging the aesthetic and intellectual assumptions of a dying century, STOREFRONT is still very much alive. I give you my memories of her birth.

We all take away our own art history from the early eighties. Mine is woven in an old haircloth of political and economic struggle, a pro-wrestling match between the power elite of SoHo, against the new young thinkers of those times. A guerilla war, between art-death and art-life, a movement and a time when I and others felt our oats.

One might say we created a Deconstructivist factory with STOREFRONT, where the creative pluralism of the streets grew spontaneously from the spores of artists not yet recognized by any establishment. Though we did not feel ourselves a part of any movement (but more as a motion creating itself as it moved, like a biker wheeling off a cliff) we lavished ourselves in dialectics and detail. Aesthetic choice was how we walked, every detail was labored over and then laughingly applied, in those art life times. What was made lived and died before our eyes.

We chose the first location of STOREFRONT, on the northern edge of 'Little Italy', as a geographical and symbolic DMZ, between the absurdly affluent SoHo and the Lower East Side where many of my compatriots lived. We saw these neighborhoods as sleazy art zones where both the indigenous community and new immigrant artists struggled for the limited resources of a wounded American economy. The name, STOREFRONT FOR ART AND ARCHITECTURE, reflected Kyong Park's and my belief that we should foremost address the needs of the artist, not as the slave class of the wealthy, but as the visionaries of a ruler-less society.

STOREFRONT emulated the ambience of the endemic 'mom and pop' stores that serviced our neighborhoods. In simplicity we hoped to facilitate function. Our function was to create a political front, a window perpetually radiating power from an underestimated art esprit de corps, a barrio art bodega. Just as each Italian social club consolidated and maintained the force of the local Italian community, we too sought freedom and means of expression for our minority, the creative underworld. STOREFRONT would represent what the art world dinosaurs, who trampled the healing herbs of our urban jungles, were not sensitive enough to perceive.

Our very lack of sound business sense, our fool-hearted fiscal vulnerability, guaranteed our credibility within the community. We fasted on the water of creation. Previous experience with Arleen Schloss and Tod Jergenson, orchestrating art events at A's, in which 'consolidating capital' meant 'counting the change in our pockets', convinced us STOREFRONT was realizable. Overhead was kept to a minimum, easy, considering the state of our collective finances, made up of unemployment checks and off-the-books construction work.

Artists continually verified their support with active participation, our creature comforts came from the streets. We slept around, and ate when we could, but the shows



always looked a million. A life style, I realize now, which made the early eighties a provocatively productive period in our lives.

The concept behind the opening show, 26 nights of live performance "From A to Z", illustrated our steadfast faith in artists to do what is right, and do it in ways never imagined by us 'coordinators'. An egg and bottle attack from a local contingency, the ex-con crowd from a local social club, who mistook a candle lit collage of syringes by the Russian couple Gerlovin for cult worship, help confirm my faith. I recall how we felt certain we would be shut down for good, after this third raid from the 'seen it all, but this takes the cake' New York police force. When, like tutored angels in the ways of the world, a provocatively beautiful Italian art performer, and her bleach blonde partner, seductively sauntered over to the local mob's headquarters and eyelash flashingly pleaded our case. The police left, leaving more quickly than they came, with hostile neighbors becoming our protectors. All thanks to the artistic negotiation of these in-house masters of body language andchutzpah.

Uncompromising erotic and political action performances were exposed, decomposed, and then released on all of us, each night from the STOREFRONT window. Twenty six nights of wild and wooly performances, many with dozens of collaborators, never of one medium, in love as we were with all that was good aesthetically, a sensual soup of sensations.

Radical innovation, the nectar of each night, forced the next artist of our alphabet to the edge, a super bowl of creative madness. The dialogues initiated lingered on, in the night air, filling our lungs with villainous ideas, and our blood with the adrenalin to make these ideals real. Our love lives merged in an orgy of interplanetary collaborations. Aliens of all sorts were fucking with each other and creating new strings of DNA. Painter, performer, architect, poet, and musician danced around the boiling caldron brewing on the curb, during those long lustful summer nights.

Days were spent setting up an ever changing exhibition of individual histories, nights we'd witness this history manifesting. It is only now, after the reactionary 90's have reared their wicked tight-ass heads, have I grown to truly appreciate the sacred seldom-blooming flower we had in our hands then. It is a middle age man's masochistic pleasure to recall the string of brilliances he watched through every orifice and nerve ending, as I did in the early days of STOREFRONT.

What came out of the initial twenty-six nights are a sorted collection of art relics, faded memories, and a few coveted snap-shots of crimes against mediocrity. Many of the artists linger on the edge still, waiting for a verdict on their own place in history. A few, featured back then, remain afloat, in these polluted seas of reaction and evasion. Some have died of AIDS, alienation, and fatigue, tired of swimming against the unrelenting tide of our troubled times.

But I do not want to suggest the flower is dead. Her seed sleeps, in the sun lit window of a mom and pop storefront, waiting for the moistening kiss of a new generation of anarchists. Living in Japan, as I do now, I am reminded daily that the seeds are not in the cute consumables we feed the wilting third world, nor in our fading old world faiths of Capital, God, and State. Instead, I suggest you do your shopping at the STOREFRONT, for there immortality, the scent of essence essential for survival, still exists for free. The soil is impregnated with a lineage of wisdom, unknown to the wicked warlords of commerce who darken our skies and seas, with the dirt of their deceptions. Kiss this seed, and set her flower free.